



BILL: SB 448 - County Boards of Education - Student Transportation - Vehicles
DATE: March 24, 2021
POSITION: Support with Amendments
COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

This bill authorizes a county board of education to provide transportation for specified public school students using a vehicle other than a Type I or Type II school vehicle when a school bus cannot reasonably be provided. These students include (1) preschool-age students; (2) students with disabilities; (3) homeless youth; (4) children in foster care; (5) students without access to school buses; (6) students in a nonpublic school placement; (7) students in dual enrollment programs or work programs or other educational programs based off the school campus. A county board of education may provide transportation to a different student group, as well, through a written determination by the board. Various reporting requirements are included and a three-year sunset provision.

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), **supports Senate Bill 448 with an amendment** to extend the sunset provision to seven years as was done on this bill's cross-file HB 72. *However, we ask the committee not to include the new "contracting agency" language that was amended onto HB 72.* As the bill is currently written, only school system employees would be permitted to use system owned vehicles. This allows for the local school systems to safely manage the vehicles and drivers. The new language in the HB 72 could be interpreted to permit any contracted transportation or ride share services to be used.

As indicated in last year's fiscal note, local school systems pay between \$448 per pupil in Frederick County, to over \$1,184 in Garrett County on transporting students. The current law requiring all school transportation via Type I and Type II vehicles or taxicabs does not adequately recognize the geographic diversity of our state. In most Local Education Agency (LEA), these modes of transportation are sufficient, but for certain populations of students in more rural areas this requirement comes at a significant cost that could otherwise be invested in the classroom. This is a difficulty made worse by the national shortage of bus drivers.

While COMAR does allow for school systems to request a waiver from the State Superintendent of Schools to use alternate vehicles, those alternatives are only permitted in very limited circumstances. Last year's fiscal note also indicated that the drivers of these vehicles would not receive a criminal background check, which is inaccurate. Any volunteer, contractor, or in this case, a driver of a non-Type I and Type II vehicle would be required to go through the required fingerprint and background processes.

This legislation would make other viable modes of transportation available to local school systems, allowing us to rededicate school bus drivers to cover full routes within our districts, and the flexibility to deal with the transportation needs of special populations, especially our most vulnerable students. For the reasons stated above, PSSAM **supports Senate Bill 448 with the 7-year sunset provision**, and urges a favorable committee report.